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Openness in Adoption and Post-Adoption Contact Agreements: A Review of the Empirical Research and Current State Law Prepared by: The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute December 1999

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute has received many inquiries about "open adoption" and post-adoption contact agreements. The requests for information have fallen into two major categories: questions about the research that has been done on openness in adoption and questions about how states have approached the issue of post-adoption contact agreements in their statutes.

This booklet provides information on both issues. Part I identifies and annotates the major empirical research that has been undertaken in the area of openness in adoption. The research is organized topically: open adoption outcomes [for infants, older children, and adoptive and birth parents with a special section on New York State Studies]; attitudes toward and trends in post-placement contact; and literature and criticism. Part II provides information on current state statutes that address Post-Adoption contact. It first reviews the laws of states that have enacted fairly comprehensive frameworks for post-adoption contact agreements and then reviews the provisions in the laws of states which have addressed post-adoption contact in more limited ways. This information is current as of December 1999.

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Outcomes

Most studies regarding openness to date have looked at the outcomes for either the birth or adoptive parents. Studies looking at the developmental outcomes of the children are fewer in number. The major longitudinal study of outcomes of infants placed in a variety of open adoption arrangements is being conducted by Ruth McRoy and Harold Grotevant. They have reported their key findings in numerous published papers.

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Infants

1. Grotevant, Harold D.; Ross, Nicole M.; Marchel, Mary Ann; and McRoy, Ruth G. "Adaptive Behavior in Adopted Children: Predictors from Early Risk, Collaboration in Relationships Within the Adoptive Kinship Network, and Openness Arrangements." *Journal of Adolescent Research* v 14, n 2 (April 1999): 231-47.

The authors examined socioemotional outcomes in 190 adopted children. The researchers sought to identify the effects of both preadoption risk factors and current adoptive family functioning on the child. The relationship between varying degrees of

openness in adoption and outcomes for children was examined as well.

In this study sample, there was no linkage between early risk factors and socioemotional development 4 to 12 years postadoption. However, the researchers note, this was a very low risk group for negative preadoption factors. Situations of abuse, neglect, and multiple foster placements were almost nonexistent.

The researchers conducted an extensive evaluation of the 12 cases in which the children had the highest risk scores. Both adoptive parents and the birth mothers were interviewed. Each of these adoptive kinship networks were assigned a rating on collaboration. The authors believe that the quality of the interaction among the adoptive parents and birth family members involved in the child's life accounts for the variance in child outcomes. Among the families who were rated low on collaboration in relationships, there often existed differing perceptions between the birth and adoptive parents about the level of openness in the adoption. Those who ranked in the middle in collaboration tended to be committed to making openness work but were having difficulty on certain issues. Those families who ranked the highest exhibited the attitude that openness was in their child's best interest and both sets of adults had found a comfortable way to interact.

Related publications:

McRoy, R. G.; Grotevant, H. D.; and White, K. L. *Openness in Adoption: New Practices, New Issues*. New York: Praeger, 1988.

Among the conclusions reached by the authors is that there is more overall satisfaction by all members of the adoption triad in semi open than in fully open adoptions. Among the problems reported were the continuing pain felt by Birth parents. Adoptive parents reported feeling burdened in preparing for the meetings with Birth parents.

McRoy, R. G., and Grotevant, H. D. "Open Adoptions: Practice and Policy Issues." *Journal of Social Work and Human Sexuality* v 6, n 3 (May 1988): 199-132.

Presents findings from an exploratory study which examines the impact of traditional, semi open and fully disclosed adoption on adoptive and birth parents. The initial findings from this sample of 17 families suggest that the degree of acceptable openness varies from family to family.

McRoy, R. G., and Grotevant, H. D. "American Experience and Research on Openness." *British Journal of Adoption and Fostering* v 15, n 4 (1991): 99-111.

This study identified 33 types of open arrangements ranging from very confidential to direct contact between parties. A key preliminary finding from this study is identifying the changes in the family process and family dynamics over the course of time in open adoptions.

Grotevant, H. D.; McRoy, R. G.; Elde, C. L.; and Fravel, D. L. "Adoptive Family System Dynamics: Variations by Level of Openness in the Adoption." *Family Process* v 33, n 2 (June 1994): 125-46.

This study looked at various levels of openness in adoption from the perspective of the adoptive parents in 190 adoptive families. In general, when compared with parents in confidential adoptions, those in open adoptions reported higher levels of acknowledgment of the adoption, empathy toward the Birth parents and their child, a stronger sense of permanence in the relationship with their child as projected into the future, and less fear that the birth mother might try to reclaim her child.

Schmid, K. "Intergenerational Relationships in Adoptive Families: Adoptive Parents' Interpretations." Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1994.

The responses of 380 adoptive parents to a semi-structured interview were analyzed. Grandparents were described as less supportive of open adoption than of adoption in general. When parents discussed the grandparents' reactions to open adoption it was usually to describe the grandparents' fear of reclaiming and concerns about open adoption.

McRoy, R. G.; Grotevant, H. D.; and Ayers-Lopez, S. *Changing Practices in Adoption*. Austin, Texas: Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 1994.

This longitudinal study of openness in adoption examines the issue from the points of view of adoptive parents (N=190), adopted children (N=171+), Birth Parents (N=169), and adoption agencies. The participants in this study were interviewed between 1987 and 1992, when the children were between the ages of four and twelve. Sixty-two families had confidential adoptions, 69 had mediated, and 59 families had fully disclosed adoptions.

For the adoptive parents, the concern that openness would lead to unwanted intrusions by the birth parent was found to be groundless. The majority of parents were satisfied with the level of contact between the child and the Birth parents. Parents who were dissatisfied with the level of contact were those who wanted more contact with the birth parent than was possible. Fear that the birth parent would reclaim the child was lowest among the parents with fully disclosed adoptions. In both confidential and mediated adoptions adoptive parents' fear was

higher than the child would be reclaimed. Reasons given for the heightened fear included stereotypical views about birth parents and awareness of media portrayals and court cases dramatizing birth parents reclaiming their children.

Regardless of type of adoption they were involved in, the children expressed the desire to know more about their birth parents. Specifically, children with less knowledge about birth parents wondered about their health and about what they looked like. Children with more information wondered about when they would see their birth parents again and about birth siblings.

Most birth parents found openness to be a satisfactory arrangement. Those with fully disclosed placements were less likely to feel regret about placing the child for adoption. They also reported feeling no jealousy or competitiveness with the adoptive families.

Christian, C. L. "Birth mother Role Adjustment in Fully-Disclosed, Mediated and Confidential Adoptions." Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

Seventy-five birth mothers with differing levels of openness in their adoptions were studied four to twelve years after placing a child. The researcher sought to determine the impact, if any, of the varying levels of openness on the adjustment of the biological mother.

The results indicate that birth mothers in time-limited mediated adoptions have the most difficulty adjusting to the adoption process.

Fravel, D. L. "Boundary Ambiguity Across Levels of Adoption Openness." Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minnesota, 1995.

The author studied 20 couples randomly selected from participants in a larger survey on openness and examined the physical and psychological presence of the birth mother in the adoptive family, from the perspective of the adoptive parents.

No differences in degree of psychological presence by level of adoption openness for fathers was found. For mothers, however, there were significant differences by level of openness. The level of psychological presence increased along with an increase in the level of openness, from confidential to mediated to fully disclosed adoptions.

Mendenhall, T. J.; Grotevant, H. D.; and McRoy, R. G. "Adoptive Couple: Communication and Changes Made in Openness Levels." *Family Relations* v 45, n 2 (April 1996): 223-29.

The communication skills of a group of adoptive couples (N=10 couples) that had increased their level of adoption openness from mediated to fully disclosed was compared with a group (N= 16 couples) that remained in mediated arrangements.

Couples with the greatest levels of openness were found to have higher levels of self-disclosure, listener's skills, empathy, continuity/tracking, respect and regard, and global communication facility than couples in the mediated group.

Wrobel, G. M.; Ayers-Lopez, S.; Grotevant, H. D.; McRoy, R. G.; and Friedrick, M. "Openness in Adoption and the Level of Child Participation." *Child Development* v 67, n 5 (1996): 2358-74.

One hundred and seventy-one children were studied to examine how their role in open adoptions influenced their conceptual understanding of what adoption means, general self-worth, satisfaction with level of openness, and curiosity about Birth parents. The children in the study were all adopted from private agencies before their first birthday and were between the ages of 4 and 12 years at the time of the study. Fifty-seven children were in confidential adoptions, 14 children were in time mediated adoptions, 45 were in ongoing mediated adoptions, and 55 were in fully disclosed adoptions.

On an individual level, children in all types of adoptions in this study reported positive levels of self-esteem, curiosity about their Birth parents, and satisfaction with their openness situation. Across all levels of openness, children approaching adolescence were generally less satisfied with their level of adoptive openness and were more curious about their Birth parents.

Grotevant, H. D.; Fravel, D. L.; Gorall, D.; and Piper, J.
 "Narratives of Adoptive Parents: Perspectives from Individual
 and Couple Interviews." *Monographs of the Society for
 Research* v 64, n 2 (1999): 69-83.

The researchers examined family narratives in a sample of 27 adoptive families. One third of the families had confidential adoptions, one third had ongoing mediated adoptions, and one third had fully disclosed adoptions.

For some couples, the story telling proceeded in a linear fashion, while other couples told their story in a more non-linear fashion. For wives, greater overall narrative coherence in the couple discussion than in the individual interview was significantly related to less marital satisfaction. A key finding was that individual interviews of adoptive parents in more open adoptions demonstrated more coherence than the interviews of adoptive parents in confidential or mediated adoptions. The researchers conclude that because families with confidential or mediated adoptions have only partial relationships with their child's birth family members it is more difficult for them to have the information they need to create and tell a coherent story.

The authors make recommendations for using the narrative process in helping pre adoptive families to think about developing a "story" that is inclusive of a child's birth culture.

2. Drasin, R. E. "The Impact of Closed, Semi-Open, and Open Adoption on Children's Psychological Development." Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1994.

This study compared the psychological adjustment of 39 children between the ages of 5 and 10 years old living in a variety of adoption arrangements. Standardized tests including the Wechsler Primary and Preschool Scale of Intelligence, the Child Behavior Checklist, and the Teacher's Report Form, and interviews were utilized by the researcher. A key finding was that regardless of the level of contact the children expressed ambivalent feelings about adoption and a desire to know more about their birthparents.

Overall, children in open (N=8) semi-open (N=7), and closed adoptions (N=11) exhibited few differences in their psychological adjustment. All three groups of children fell within the normal range of psychological development. Children in the semi-open adoptions appeared to be experiencing the most difficulties.

Older Children

1. Fratter, J. "Parties in the Triangle." *Adoption and Fostering* v 15, n 4 (1991): 91-98.

This British study of 22 adoptive families found that some form of continuing contact could work well for families with special needs children. The nature of the contact with birthparents varied widely. Initially, 16 families felt that ongoing contact with birthparents was a positive experience for their children. A key element, as described by the adoptive parents, was the ability of the birthparents to accept their changed role.

The families were reinterviewed three years later. All of those who initially felt positive about openness had not changed their opinions. Four birthparents were reinterviewed. They also felt the ongoing contact had been a positive experience for themselves, as well as the children and adoptive

parents.

Related publications:

Fratter, J.; et al. *Permanent Family Placement: A Decade of Experience*. London: BAAF, 1991.

2. Berry, M. "Adoptive Parents' Perceptions of, and Comfort with, Open Adoption." *Child Welfare* v 72, n 3 (1993): 231-53.

This article presents the results of a survey of 1,268 adoptive parents in California. The study was designed to learn about the correlates of openness in adoption and the predictors of comfort with openness. Preplacement sharing of information and postplacement contact was fairly common in this sample of adoptions finalized between 1988 and 1989. Postplacement contact was most likely in adoptions of infants, in adoptions of children with no history of mistreatment, and in adoptions by relatives.

Predictors of high levels of comfort with open adoption were: 1) the adoptive parents had planned the contact, 2) the child's absence of history of mistreatment, 3) the biological mother's level of education, 4) the adoptive mother's older age, and 5) preplacement meeting between the two sets of parents. Among the groups with low levels of comfort with open adoption, those who met the biological parent prior to placement report significantly higher levels of comfort with postplacement contact. Adoptive parents in transracial adoptions were no different than same race adopters in terms of comfort.

Those adopting through private agencies experienced the least direct contact--primarily mail-only contact, and reported the highest comfort levels with contact. Independent adopters experienced more in-person contacts with biological parents and also reported high comfort levels. Adoptive parents using public agencies reported lower levels of comfort with open adoption. The researchers attribute this to, in many cases, the child having been abused by the biological parent.

There were high levels of uncertainty among the

adoptive parents regarding the long-range effect of openness on the child and on their family.

Related publications:

Berry, M. "The Practice of Open Adoption: Findings From a Study of 1396 Adoptive Families." *Children and Youth Services Review* v 13, n 5-6 (1991): 379-95.

Berry, Marianne; Dylla, Debora J. Cavazos; and Needell, Barbara. "The Role of Open Adoption in the Adjustment of Adopted Children and Their Families." *Children and Youth Services Review* v 20, n 1-2 (1998): 151.

3. Neil, E. "The Sibling Relationships of Adopted Children and Patterns of Contact after Adoption." *Adoption & Fostering* v 23, n 1 (Spring 1999): 59-60.

This article presents preliminary findings from a study of 209 adopted children and focuses on results related to sibling relationships. Eighty-five of the adopted children had birth siblings. Over half of the children had siblings living elsewhere in two or more locations. Thirty-two percent of the children with siblings who had been adopted had a birth sibling in their adoptive family. Ongoing contact was more likely when a sibling lived with a grandparent or aunt/uncle than with a birth parent.

Adoptive & Birth Parents

1. Bailey, J. M. "Making the Adoption Decision: A Study of Birthmothers." Ph.D. diss., The Union Institute, 1997.

Twenty-five birthmothers who were voluntary placing their infants in an open adoption were interviewed. The study looked at the childhood experiences, current status, and feelings of these women to determine if there were patterns of similar internal and external experiences.

Among the findings reported were experiences of

transiency, disconnection, and loss in the lives of the young women.

2. Lancette, J., and McClure, B. A.
"Birthmothers: Grieving the Loss of a Dream."
Journal of Mental Health Counseling v 14, n 1
(1992): 84-96.

This article examines the grief reactions of five women who placed their infants in open adoptions. The women had placed their children within the two years prior to the interviews. Several stages of grief were experienced by the women, including: denial, anger, guilt, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. A major source of grief was the loss of dreams and fantasies associated with motherhood, marriage, and the family.

3. Lauderdale, J. L., and Boyle, J. S. "Infant Relinquishment Through Adoption." *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* v 26, n 3 (Fall 1994): 213-17.

Twelve birthmothers were interviewed about their experiences using open-ended questions. Birthmothers who experienced open adoption showed attachment to their fetuses and sought support and prenatal care. Birthmothers who experienced closed adoption described nonattachment to their pregnancies, chose to hide their pregnancy, did not receive prenatal care, and experienced difficulty accepting the loss of their child.

Related publications:

Lauderdale, J. L. "The Unbroken Cord: The Experience of Infant Relinquishment Through Adoption." Ph. D. diss., The University of Utah, 1992.

4. Blanton, T. L., and Deschner, J. "Biological Mother's Grief: The Postadoptive Experience in Open Versus Confidential Adoption." *Child Welfare* v 69, n 6 (1990): 525-35.

The study participants included 59 women who

had placed their children for adoption through an agency at least one year before the study -- 18 via open adoption and 41 via confidential adoption. The women ranged in age from 16 to 45 years. The participants were overwhelmingly Caucasian. The results of the survey indicate that mothers relinquishing a child in open adoptions experience more grief symptoms in the immediate postadoption period than mothers with confidential adoption arrangements, or bereaved parents.

The authors caution that all birthmothers in this survey were women who had experienced adoption through agency programs and the results may not be generalized to a broader population of birthmothers.

5. Belbas, N. F. "Staying in Touch: Empathy in Open Adoptions." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* v 57, n 3 (1987): 184-98.

To explore aspects of empathy in open adoptions, 12 adoptive families in open adoptions were interviewed. Seven families had minimum contact, two had moderate contact, and three had maximum openness. The author found that families with maximum contact were less likely to worry about kidnaping, while parents who had letter-only contact were those most worried about the biological parents seeking to take the child back.

Families in the survey reported friends and family members were often pessimistic or negative about openness, and suggested severing ties with the birthparents. Most of the parents were initially uncertain about openness but felt it was required by the agencies. All of the parents also reported being unprepared by previous life experiences to deal with open adoption.

None of the families felt the experience of openness adversely affected the ties they have with their children, nor did any of the families report that having contact with the birthmother made them worry about whether or not the child loved them.

6. Dominick, C. *Early Contact in Adoption: Contact Between Birthmothers and Adoptive Parents at the Time of and After the Adoption.* Wellington, New Zealand: Research Series No. 10. Research Section, Department of Social Welfare, 1988.

Adoptive parents and birthmothers in 527 adoptions, approximately half of which involved contact between the two sets of parents, participated in this study designed to ascertain their reactions to the contact. The key findings demonstrate that all parties benefitted from openness. Adoptive parents reported that contact with birthmothers increased their feelings of security as parents and deepened their relationships with their child. Birthmothers reported that contact provided them with needed reinforcement that their decision to place the child was the right one and that their child was being well cared for.

7. Van Keppel, M. "Openness in Adoption: Birth Parents and Negotiated Adoption Agreements." *Adoption and Fostering* v 15, n 4 (1991): 81-90.

The author surveyed 72 Australian birthmothers and 2 birthfathers, 64 of the women had experienced closed adoptions. Nearly all reported that negotiating arrangements to suit both adoptive and birthparents was the most beneficial to all parties.

8. Demick, J. "Adaptation of Marital Couples to Open Versus Closed Adoption: A Preliminary Investigation." In *Parental Development*, edited by J. Demick, K. Bursick, and R. DiBiasse, 175-201. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 1993.

Thirty couples, 15 in open adoptions and 15 in closed adoptions, all of whom had adopted healthy infants within the past two years, participated in this exploratory survey. The two groups did not differ from one another on the

major adjustment and/or quality of life measures.

Those in closed adoptions expressed more concern about their attachment to their infant than did those practicing open adoption. Those practicing closed adoption also tended more than those in open adoptions to perceive their infant as demanding and bothersome.

The group with open adoptions were more concerned with political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities than were the closed adoption group.

Related publications:

Clayman, N. H., and Demick, J. "The Adoptive Parenting Experience: Is It Perceived as Different from Biological Parenting?" Unpublished manuscript, ca 1987.

Based on a study of 38 adoptive parents, the author's concluded that adoptive parents were more likely to acknowledge a difference between biological and adoptive parenting.

Silverstein, D. R., and Demick, J. "Toward an Organizational-Relational Model of Open Adoption." *Family Process* v 33, n 2 (June 1994): 111-24.

9. Etter, J. "Levels of Cooperation and Satisfaction in 56 Open Adoptions." *Child Welfare* v 72, n 3 (1993): 257-67.

This survey was designed to investigate whether biological and adoptive parents could cooperate with each other in open mediated adoptions. The sample population included 55 adoptive mothers and 38 adoptive fathers and 32 biological mothers and 4 biological fathers. "Mediated" refers to the concept of birthparents and adoptive parents working with a mediator to develop guidelines for future communication and contact.

Adoptive parents reported that no biological parent broke the agreement by pressuring adoptive parents or visiting unannounced. Of the adoptive parents, 98.2 percent kept their agreements with respect to visits. Only one family reported not allowing the biological mother to visit as required in their agreement. Typically, visits were arranged for 2-3 times per year.

Both biological and adoptive parents showed high levels of satisfaction with their open adoptions four and one-half years after the adoption.

The author focuses on three factors which she believes contributed to the success of the participants surveyed: 1) all participants chose the level of openness they desired before matching; 2) extensive education for both adoptive parents and birthparents; and 3) explicit contracts with the expectations of all parts explained in writing.

Related publications:

Etter, J. "Use of Mediated Agreements in Adoptions." *Mediation Quarterly* v 22 (Winter 1988): 383-89.

Etter, J., and Chally, J. *Adoption Mediation Training Manual*. Eugene, OR: Adoption Teamwork Press, 1988.

Etter, J., and Giovannini, M. *Documentation Project: The Success Rate of Mediated Adoption Agreements, 1990 Pilot Survey of 56 Open Adoptions*. Portland, OR: Open Adoption and Family Services, 1990.

10. Gross, H. E. "Open Adoption: A Research-Based Literature Review and New Data." *Child Welfare* v 77, n 3 (1993): 269-84.

The author reports on her ongoing study of openness and findings as they relate to the previous research. Of 32 adoptive couples in the author's study, 84 percent were mainly satisfied with the open arrangements. Of the 16 biological mothers interviewed, only one was dissatisfied with the level of openness. Satisfaction was based on level of contact, overall evaluation of open adoption, and attitude changes since placement.

Related publications:

Gross, H. E. "Variants of Open Adoptions: The Early Years." *Marriage and Family Review* v 25, n 1-2 (1997): 19-42.

11. Siegel, D. H. "Open Adoption of Infants: Adoptive Parents' Perceptions of Advantages and Disadvantages." *Social Work* v 38, n 1 (1993): 15-

23.

This study addressed adoptive parents' feelings about their open adoptions during their children's infancy and early childhood. The sample group of 21 parents were families from the New England area who responded to an open letter placed by the researcher. Five of the open adoptions were through an agency. The level of openness experienced by the individual couples varied considerably.

The respondents reported a wide range of initial reservations and apprehension about open adoption arrangements. Only four respondents expressed no initial misgivings about the arrangement. Most reported they chose to pursue an open adoption, despite their initial misgivings, because closed adoptions were unavailable.

Although several disadvantages of open adoptions were reported, not one respondent expressed regret at having an open adoption.

12. Kaainoa, R. P. "A Study of the Relationship Between Adoptive Mothers and Birth Mothers in Open Adoption." Master's Thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 1994.

Five birthmothers and 15 adoptive mothers were interviewed in this exploratory study of relationships in open adoptions. The adoptions had occurred within five years of the study. The major obstacle in the relationship for birthmothers was their grief over loss of the child. For adoptive mothers, negotiation of boundaries and fulfillment of competing needs was the most difficult aspects. Overall, both sets of mothers were somewhat satisfied with their relationships.

13. Becker, K. W. "The Effect of High and Low Levels of Contact in Open Adoption on the Experiences of Adoptive Parents and Birth Parents." Ph.D. diss., University of Northern Colorado, 1994.

Adoptive couples (N=72) and birthparents (N=36)

in open adoptions reporting high levels of contact were compared with adoptive couples and birthparents in open adoptions reporting low levels of contact. Differences between adoptive parents serving as the primary contact and adoptive parents serving as the secondary contact with birthfamilies were also analyzed.

No significant differences were found in the areas of marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, cohesion and adaptability between the high and low contact level adoptive parents. No differences were found in the levels of grief experienced by birthmothers in the low and high level contact groups.

The study found that adoptive parents who serve as the primary contact with birthparents perceive their marital relationship as less satisfying and believe that problems with communication and conflict resolution exist within their marriage.

14. Waddoups, J. "Open Adoption, Human Capital Formation, and Uncertainty." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* v 15, n 1 (1994): 5-21.

Based on the responses by 107 adoptive parents the author concludes that fear of not bonding with the child was the primary concern of adoptive parents contemplating an open adoption.

15. Robinson, S. A. "Adoption Anxiety Among Prospective Adoptive Parents." Master's Thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1995.

This research explores the relationship between the gender of the adoptive parent and the anxiety they feel toward the birthmother in open adoptions. Forty-eight adoptive parents all recruited through Catholic Charities Adoption Services participated in the study.

The primary finding was that mothers tended to be more anxious than fathers about their relationship with the birthmother before

finalization of the adoption.

16. Daily, C. A. "Experiences of Adoptive Parents in Open Adoptions: A Descriptive Study." Master's Thesis, Smith College School for Social Work, 1997.

Ten families with 15 adopted children participated in this study of open adoption. The major finding was that despite the complexities and additional responsibilities presented by open adoption, all of the adoptive parents felt positive about the arrangement.

17. Hanssen, G. M. "Extending Families: How Adoptive Parents Transition to Openness." Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1997.

The author interviewed 30 adoptive families to compare those with ongoing, direct contact with birthparents with those without contact. Few differences in the experiences or beliefs of the adoptive parents prior to adoption were found. However, parents with more open adoptions were found to be more extroverted. Less extroverted parents experienced a more protracted transition to openness.

18. Yngvesson, B. "Negotiating Motherhood: Identity and Difference in "Open" Adoptions." *Law and Society Review* v 31, n 1 (April 1997): 31-80.

Based on interviews with six birth and six adoptive parents in open adoption arrangements, the author contends that these relationships fall into familiar categories centering around nature and law, as well as introducing new categories unfamiliar to legal classification.

19. Balke, T. W. T. B. "The Perceptions of The Roles of Birthfathers in Adoption: A New Zealand Perspective." Ph. D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1996.

This study sought to examine the relationships between birthfathers (N=10) and their adopted children in both contact and noncontact adoptive situations.

As well as interviewing birthfathers, interviews were undertaken with birthmothers (N=16), adoptive mothers (N=20) and adoptive fathers (N=20). Several themes emerged. In adoptive families in which contact between child and birthfather occurred each viewed the other as part of an extended family network. Most of the adoptive families saw contact with the birthfather as beneficial for the child and anticipated more contact as the child became older.

20. Flores de Kistler, M. J. "The Transcultural Adoption Experience." Ph.D. diss., California State University, Long Beach, CA, 1995.

Seventeen two-parent families and one single-parent male and female who had adopted children of different ethnic backgrounds completed a self-administered questionnaire designed by the researcher to examine their adoption experiences. The children were described as African American, Hispanic, and Native American.

The majority of the parents felt it was important for the child to know about his or her culture of origin. All except one parent reported that the children were initially accepted by their family members, and friends. Some of the families reported that the adoption had caused them to become more aware of and sensitive to the problems encountered by members of other cultures.

When interviewed about specific aspects of the adoption process (all had adopted through the same agency) most expressed positive opinions. All felt open adoption was a positive choice.

New York Studies

The primary research in openness that has utilized adoptive families from the New York area is the work conducted by Rosemary Avery, who is at Cornell University. She has published numerous articles focusing on specific aspects of the information gained from her study. Judith Lee, a private practitioner in New York City, recently released findings from her study, which focused on adoptive families who had adopted through a suburban New York law firm specializing in private adoptions.

1. Avery, Rosemary J. "Information Disclosure and Openness in Adoption: State Policy and Empirical Evidence." *Children and Youth Services Review* v 20, n 1-2 (1998):57-85.

This research focused on attitudes toward, and experiences with, openness in adoption in a sample of 1,274 adoptive parents in 743 adoptive homes in New York State. Results

indicate that a substantial majority of adoptive parents in the study favor a change in State statutes allowing greater openness in adoption and that adoptive mothers are more open to the concept of information disclosure than adoptive fathers.

Open adoptions were practiced in only a minority of adoptions in this study. When contact does exist, it is far more likely to be with a birth mother than a birth father. Openness in adoption was found to differ by age, race, and by prior experience with fostering or adoption.

The children of adoptive parents with the highest levels of education were less likely to have any contact with birthparents. African American adopted children were the least likely to have contact with birthparents.

2. Avery, R. J., and Ashton, J. *Adoptive Parents' Attitudes Toward Openness in Adoption Records: A Study of New York State Adoptive Parents: 1994-*

1995. New York: New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc., 1996.

This study sought to identify the opinions of adoptive parents in New York State related to an adult adoptees right to obtain a copy of his/her original birth certificate. Older adoptive mothers were more supportive of open adoption records, while Caucasian adoptive fathers and both adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers who had prior experience with fostering or adoption were less accepting of the concept of open records.

Related publications:

Avery, R. J. *Information Disclosure and Openness in Adoption: State Policy and Empirical Evidence*. Photocopied Manuscript. August 1996.

3. Lee, J. S., and Twaite, J. A. "Open Adoption and Adoptive Mothers: Attitudes Toward Birthmothers, Adopted Children, and Parenting." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* v 67, n 4 (October 1997): 576-584.

This research analyzed the relationship between contact between adoptive (N=238) and biological mothers and the adoptive mothers' attitudes toward: 1) the biological mother; 2) the child; and 3) the nature of parenting.

The primary finding was that adoptive mothers who had met the birthmother prior to the child's birth had more favorable attitudes toward both the biological mother and the child. Other findings were that increased contact between the adoptive and biological mothers resulted in adoptive mother's perceiving their child as both competent and controllable. In addition, when those adoptive mothers having no contact at all with the biological mother were compared to those who did have contact, it was found that adoptive mothers who had some type of contact were less likely to avoid communicating with their child, and to be less intrusive, as well as more likely to accept age-appropriate developmental milestones.

Related publications:

Lee, J. S. "Attitudes of Adoptive Mothers Toward Adopted Children and Their Birthmothers as Related to Communication Between Adoptive and Biological Mothers." Ph.D. diss., New York University, New York, 1994.

POLICY AND PRACTICE

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